WESTERN MONTNAN PLANNING ZONE FOREST PLAN REVISION

CONTENT ANALYSIS REPORT

Forest Plan Revision
Proposed Action

Bitterroot, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests
November 2004

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Part 1: Introduction and Issues

Listening to and interpreting the voice of the public is an important step in forest plan revision. We received roughly 2,800 responses to the Proposed Action released in January 2004. This report is a summary of our understanding of what we heard, and the conclusions we have drawn.

The report is organized in two parts:

- Part 1: Introduction and Significant Issues
- Part 2: Compilation of "Statements of Public Concern"

What We Have Done So Far

In January, 2004, we (the Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo National Forests) issued our Notice of Intent to update Land and Resource Management Plans for the Bitterroot, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests, and an accompanying Proposed Action. The comment period on the Proposed Action ran from January 23 to April 22, 2004. We received over 2,800 responses, including letters, e-mails, faxes, and verbal comments. We chose to do the content analysis ourselves rather than having it done by an outside contractor to ensure we were exposed to the full flavor of responses. While the analysis process has taken longer than expected, we have met our objective of gaining a more complete understanding of public issues and concerns and can now begin to develop alternatives that respond to these issues.

How We Did the "Content Analysis"

Our first step in content analysis was to number and log each response as it arrived in our office. This log allows us to link each individual response to the particular area (or areas) where it was categorized. In some cases we can trace responses directly to a particular Statement of Public Concern (PC Statement).

Once all the responses were in, we set about the task of assigning a Category Code to every single substantive "comment," in every single "response." In technical language, a "response" is the entire letter or other text we received, while a "comment" is an individual part of the letter, sometimes as short as a single sentence. The assigned Category Code allowed us to group similar comments together. For example, every comment that seemed to address management of noxious weeds was assigned to Category 62100, which is a sub-category of Forest Health (62000), within the general area of Natural Resource Management (60000). Each "comment" was carried forward as a complete statement, including as much of the original wording as necessary to make it as clear as possible what the respondent was trying to tell us. This was a long process, but it assured that we did not accidentally distort a respondent's intentions by reducing comments to short phrases or bullet statements.

Once coding was completed, we hand-typed the coded comments into a computer database. Data entry was then carefully reviewed and cross-checked

to minimize mistakes. Next, we read the comments grouped within each category to arrive at statements of the main points we thought we were seeing. These are called Statements of Public Concern, and they are presented in total in Part 2 of this report.

The final task was to study all of the 830 PC Statements to identify those that represented concerns of significance that should be responded to in different ways, in different alternatives. The remaining PC statements either will be treated the same in every alternative, or may differ between alternatives but probably in ways that are not highly significant. We will explain our handling of these "other" PC Statements in Part 3 of the report.

Through this content analysis process, we tried to identify all relevant issues, not just those represented by the majority of respondents. The breadth, depth, and rationale of each comment were especially important. In addition to capturing relevant factual input, we tried to capture the emotion and strength of public sentiment behind particular viewpoints in order to represent the public's concerns as fairly as possible.

It is important to keep in mind that many of the comments are very general and may have been submitted in many different ways, while others are quite individualized. Every comment has the same value, whether expressed by many, or by just one respondent. Analyzing the comments was not a vote-counting process. The outcome was not determined by majority opinion. The content analysis process we used ensured that every comment was read and analyzed, and will be considered during the decision process. Of course, Forest Supervisors and District Rangers are made aware of the relative numbers of responses that addressed particular issues, and they will incorporate that knowledge in their decision-making thought process in whatever manner they feel is most appropriate.

Public Concern Statements

We have organized the Statements of Public Concern (PC Statements) into the following major categories:

- **Planning Process**: the forest plan revision process, public involvement, and agency funding.
- **Laws, Acts and Policies**: NEPA and NFMA.
- **Environmental Values**: ecosystem management, soil, water, wildlife, etc.
- **Access and Transportation System**: roads and trails management.
- **Recreation**: motorized and non-motorized recreation, facilities, fees, etc.
- **Land Ownership and Land Designations**: land acquisitions and rights-of-way. **Special Land Designations**: wilderness and roadless area management.
- **Natural Resources Management**: timber resource, noxious weed, fire, and forest-private interface management, etc.
- **Social Values**: population and quality of life.
- **Economic Values**: commodities and the local economies.

Each category is further divided into sub-sections, where each PC Statement is supported by one or more sample comments that convey actual original wording from people who provided input relevant to that Statement. For each sample statement, a letter number is provided, which makes it possible to track the comment back to the original response, if necessary. The purpose of listing the public concerns this way is to provide an overview of the voluminous comments in a condensed format that captures the main issues from the public's perspective. This listing ensures that those main issues are all carefully considered.

Alternative-Driving Issues

In the end, we arrived at what we believe to be the five alternative-driving issues reflected by the PC Statements. In the language of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), these are known as *Significant* issues. Because not all public concerns were directly tied to these significant issues, we also used the following four additional categories to be sure that we could respond to all public concerns in the most appropriate way.

1. Concerns that are already addressed by laws, regulations, or National and Regional policies, and therefore, are outside our forest plan decision authority.
2. Concerns that could be addressed through mitigation requirements or standards in the revised forest plans.
3. Concerns that could be addressed through the analysis and display of the effects of implementing the revised forest plans.
4. Concerns that were either not strategic in nature and so would be addressed elsewhere, through site-specific project planning, or were outside the scope of this analysis.

Here is a list of the five alternative-driving issues. Note that each issue statement includes one or more questions that each Forest Supervisor will directly respond to in his or her final decision, followed by several bullet points that represent specific dimensions of that question that were raised as public concerns.

Issue 1:Access and Travel Management

- Where and what type of road and trail access should the Forest Service provide?
  - Access for particular activities: firewood, timber harvest, campsites, traditional gathering, etc.
  - Motorized recreational activities: driving for pleasure, OHV etc.
  - Non-motorized – quiet
  - Snowmobile
  - Bicycles (mechanized)
- How should the transportation infrastructure be managed?

  - Decommissioning, obliteration, culverts, long-term closure/storage, seasonal closure.
  - Road maintenance
  - User created routes (mechanized and motorized) created prior to Jan 2001

Issue 2: Vegetation Management

- How much, where, and what type of vegetative management would occur?
  - Salvage
  - Suitable for timber production
  - Old growth
  - Wildlife habitat
  - Economic and community vitality
  - Private Residential and National Forest Margin
  - Invasive species

Issue 3: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Integrity

- What is the proper balance of management activities to maintain biodiversity and habitat to support viable populations of native and desired non-native species?
- Which areas need what kind of management direction to support overall biodiversity as well as viability of species?
  - Historic Range of Variation
  - Habitat Connectivity
  - T&E species and habitat protection
  - Fire management

Issue 4: Roadless Area Management

- How much and where should acreage be recommended for wilderness designation?
- How much, where and how should inventoried roadless areas be managed?
  - Watershed integrity
  - Quiet recreation
  - T&E species and habitat protection
  - Road construction
  - Salvage harvest
  - Suitable for timber production
  - Fuels and fire management
  - Motorized use/ Winter motorized

Issue 5: Recreation

- Outfitter Guide Management in the Bob Marshall Wilderness
- Where should new development be prohibited?